

September 28, 2014  
Sunday Evening Service  
Series: Hebrews  
Community Baptist Church  
643 S. Suber Road  
Greer, SC 29650  
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*To Ponder . . .*

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from Hebrews 1:1-3.

1. Describe the many times and many ways God spoke in the past.
2. Describe how God speaks through the Son.
3. Why is it important to understand that Jesus, God the Son, is superior to the prophets and priests of Old Testament times?
4. What do all the Old Testament symbols and sacrifices tell us?

### **GOD HAS SPOKEN Hebrews 1:1-3**

Scientists invent, build, and use giant telescopes and space microphones in attempts to pick up some kind of communication from other worlds. So far they have had no luck. Maybe there are no other worlds out there. Maybe planet earth is the only planet inhabited by living beings in the universe.

What is this drive, this penchant that makes educated and otherwise reasonable men and women keep searching for other worlds? Maybe it is the fact that God has put eternity in our hearts. God has revealed His character, which includes His *eternal power and divine nature*, in the things He has made. Therefore, there is something in our souls that keeps telling us that when our earthly tent is destroyed, there is something else.

This is why humanity has a penchant to look for God, the supernatural, the other-worldly. Considering the plethora of books, movies, web sites, blogs, and various organizations' dedication to the paranormal and to religion, we must conclude that humanity as a whole is driven to hear from another world.

And all the time our peers wear themselves out trying to hear from another world, God has spoken from eternity. God has clearly described His plan for redeeming the fallen creation. For centuries under the Mosaic Law, God gave pictures and symbols of the final sacrifice for sin. Finally, He in the person of the Son, came to earth and offered that sacrifice. Nothing else compares. All the imaginations, works, and religions of human history cannot accomplish what God told us the Son has accomplished. Wise people listen when God speaks.

### **God Spoke in the Past (v.1).**

The reader who loves God should be thankful for these opening words that remind us that our Creator was gracious to speak. The author penned, *Long ago, at many times and in many ways God spoke (v.1a)*. That God would speak to His creation is amazing. That is not always the way it was. In the beginning, communication from God was expected. He created all things perfectly. He created humans in His image. He enjoyed fellowship with His image bearers. That was God's plan all along. But the image bearers marred the image, fell into sin, rebelled against God, and broke the fellowship. That is why it is amazing that God spoke at all.

When God speaks, He breaks into our limited world. Because of sin, we live in a finite world. We do not experience eternity – where God dwells. We do not experience the supernatural, which is the best way to describe God's existence. Therefore, we do not experience the fullness of God. But because God created us in His image, there are vestiges of "godness" within us that wonder about these things. Religion is man's experiment to find God, the eternal and the supernatural. Man-made religions are a way of trying to escape the confines of the mundane, passing world in an attempt to peer into the eternal. It is futile because we know nothing of the infinite, the eternal, the supernatural.

But God in His grace and mercy chose to speak to us. In speaking, He reveals many of His character traits. In speaking, He gives a glimpse of the eternal, the supernatural. In speaking, God describes the righteousness which our parents Adam and Eve forfeited. A righteousness that can be ours again through Christ.

That God would speak to His creation many times and many ways is gracious. The author pointed out that at many times God spoke in the past. Bible history reveals that off and on with a certain amount of regularity, God was speaking to humans from the time of Abraham onward. At times of special works or crisis, God spoke more regularly. Such a case was when God delivered His people from Egypt and took them to the Promised Land. Another example would be when the people were in rebellion serving rebellious kings during those tumultuous years of the divided kingdom.

Sometimes God went silent and chose not to communicate a message. Those silent times made the times that God spoke very special. Asaph wrote of a time when no prophet spoke the message of God (Psalm 74:9). God was definitely silent for 400 years after He spoke through Malachi.

God not only spoke many times in the past, but when He did, God spoke in many ways. For example, God spoke to Moses through the burning bush. He spoke to the people of Israel through the fire, lightening, thunder and smoke at Mount Sinai. He spoke to Elijah in a still small voice. God spoke in dreams, visions, symbols, parables, and types. God spoke in law, history, poetry, and wisdom literature. There are various kinds of literary genres represented in the Bible. They are some of the many ways God spoke. All of this evidence should cause us to conclude that it is amazingly gracious for God to break into our finite world to describe the infinite!

While we stand amazed that God would speak at all, even more remarkable is the fact that God spoke quite specifically through the prophets. The writer reminded the readers that *God spoke to our fathers by the prophets (v.1b)*. The term “our fathers” has to refer to the Jewish patriarchs and forefathers. This is a logical conclusion in light of the fact that the bulk of the Old Testament was addressed to the nation of God’s choice – the Israelites. This was important because as Jesus told the Samaritan woman, “Salvation is from the Jews.” He told her, *You worship what you do not know; we worship*

*what we know, for salvation is from the Jews (John 4:22)*. That truth explained God’s promise to the original Jew, Abraham, that *in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice (Genesis 22:18)*. Therefore, God the Son came first to the Jewish people. It was indeed as John wrote, *He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him (John 1:11)*. They should have received Him because the entire Old Testament, their Bible, prepared the way for God the Son to come to earth.

However, the Greek grammar in this text placed a definite article before “fathers” which clearly means *the fathers*. The fathers can refer to all the forefathers who lived and died from the time of creation until the coming of Christ. All of the Old Testament people were responsible for the self-revelation God had given. Therefore, while the Jews received the most specific attention through messages from God, all humanity is liable for knowing what God said.

God’s chosen mouthpieces, who spoke primarily to the Hebrews, were called prophets. Therefore, in the Old Testament we have record of God speaking directly to people through other people. The mouthpieces were the objects of God’s intentional choice. Many of the prophets have books bearing their names such as those we call the major prophets (major messages) like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel. Then there are the minor prophets (smaller messages) like Hosea, Joel, Amos, and nine others. But many prophets who God chose to be His mouthpieces have no writings or books in the Bible named for them. This in spite of the fact that some of them were very important to the history of God’s people. Elijah and Elisha were very significant spokesmen for God in Israel, but there is no book in the Bible named for them. There were also men like Nathan, Ahijah, Jehu, Micaiah, and Zechariah (killed by Joash) who played significant roles as God’s spokesmen. There was even an unnamed prophet (Judges 6:8) as well as the guy called “the old prophet of Bethel” (1 Kings 13:11).

Sometimes God even declared His message through pagans or even animals. Balaam was certainly no righteous servant of Yahwah. And Balaam’s donkey doesn’t have a book named after him, but God certainly spoke through it. Even the heavens declare God’s glory (Psalm 19:1) and His righteousness (Psalm 50:6).

All of these people and sometimes things fit the definition of the New Testament term *propheiteis*. The prophet is a proclaimer or an interpreter of divine revelation. The verb form of the word means to speak forth or make a public declaration. All of them were the specific choice of God to communicate a particular message for a particular time. They pointed out rebellion. They promised peace and restoration. They warned of coming judgment. But most of all they spoke about God's amazing plan of redemption through the coming Messiah, even when they didn't understand what they were talking about.

Peter described that dilemma by writing, *Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look (1 Peter 1:10-12).*

What an amazingly, gracious God that He would condescend to speak to us fallen sinners. Not only did He speak, but He kept telling us about the amazing salvation He would offer. And yet the Old Testament Scripture was not all that God wants us to know. All of His speaking through prophets and in many ways was unfinished or incomplete. Though God used forty-four different writers who recorded God's messages over a period of 1,500 years, He was not done yet. God chose to complete His revelation by speaking to us about salvation through the Son.

### **God Speaks Through the Son (vv.2-3).**

The second verse presents what appears to be a paradox by stating (essentially) that our Creator speaks through the Creator. How can that be? The author informed us that in these last days God speaks through the Son. He wrote, *but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son (v.2a)*. These last days are the days after Christ. God spoke in many ways in times past, which were the Old Testament times. God speaks now through the Son. According to this

statement, all of history really can be divided into BC and AD (Anno Domini – the year of our Lord). This fits with the truth that at precisely the right time, when all things were fulfilled, God sent Christ to reveal God. Paul put it like this, *But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law (Galatians 4:4)*. The previous revelation was not completed until the Son came.

But how does God speak through His Son? Obviously, God spoke through the Son quite clearly during three years of earthly ministry. In that setting, Jesus confessed often that He came to do the work and will of the Father. He told the people that He taught what He knew and experienced in heaven. For example, when Jesus was in Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles, the religious leaders argued with Him, to which He replied: *“I have much to say about you and much to judge, but he who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him” (John 8:26)*. A bit later He declared, *“I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father” (John 8:38)*. This claim angered the people so Jesus replied, *“But now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did” (John 8:40)*.

In a way as authoritative and clear as those lessons from Jesus, God continues to speak through Jesus. The words of Jesus, as they are recorded through the four Gospel accounts, speak loudly still. They speak with the authority John heard as Jesus spoke in the Revelation where John wrote all that He said. John introduced the writing as, *The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John (Revelation 1:1)*. In that setting Jesus told John, *Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this (Revelation 1:19)*.

Indeed the entire Bible is the voice of God speaking through God the Son. It is about the Son. It exalts the Son. It reminds us that all of God's plan for all of eternity centers on the obedient, righteous work of the Son. Therefore, since the written Word about the Living Word has been completed, we can be confident that we have all that God desires for us to know about Himself at this time. In contrast to the authoritative word of God, much extra-biblical revelation exalts

the creature, the humans. Most extra-biblical revelation creates a different gospel that minimizes the work of the Son or removes Him altogether. But we can rest confidently that we have the information God desires for us to have and that is sufficient.

In the authoritative word God has spoken to us, we learn that God the Son is Creator and Heir. It is He *whom God appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world (v.2b)*. This is God's way of illustrating the Son's excellence. He is superior to all Old Testament pictures and types of sacrifice and worship, all priests, and all prophets, because God the Father appointed Him heir of all things. Maybe He has been heir for all eternity. Or maybe, because of His obedience and work of providing the sacrifice for salvation, the Father appointed Him to this position of honor. That might be the case since after His death, burial, and resurrection Jesus said, *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me"* (Matthew 28:18).

That idea might also fit with the scene John saw in heaven. *Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals. And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. And one of the elders said to me, "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals." And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on*

*the earth"* (Revelation 5:1-10). The Heir to all the universe is the Lamb who redeemed it with His own blood.

It is fitting that He should be heir of all things because He created all things. John also made this point at the opening of His Gospel where he wrote, *All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made (John 1:3)*. It is the same point Paul made, *For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him. (17) And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together (Colossians 1:16-17)*.

Since He is heir to all creation and since He is our creator and sustainer, would it not be wise for us to hear Him, to listen to Him when He speaks? God the Father told people to do just that when Jesus was baptized and began His ministry. Mark wrote that *a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased"* (Mark 1:11). Again at the transfiguration God told the disciples to listen to the Son. *Peter was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him"* (Matthew 17:5). Peter never got over God interrupting him, and over thirty years later wrote, *For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased"* (2 Peter 1:17).

It is true that all that God said in the many ways in the Old Testament is critically important. It is also true that all that God said through the prophets is critically important. But now God speaks through Him who is superior to prophets. The Son is superior because He reveals the glory of God. *He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power (v.3a)*. What does it mean that Jesus Christ, God the Son, is the radiance of the glory of God? It means that God's glory shines from Him. Such must be the case for eternity. Therefore, people should have seen some of God's glory shining while He ministered on earth. Yet, this was part of the glory of God that the Son shrouded while He was man among men.

On one occasion, on the mount with Peter, James, and John, the Son allowed a glimpse of this glory to radiate. Mark wrote, *And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. And Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified (Mark 9:2-6).*

Furthermore, the Son is the exact imprint of His nature. We know God because the Son is the exact image, imprint, reproduction of God. This is why John wrote: *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14).* And, *No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known (John 1:18).* And later he wrote, *The life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us (1 John 1:2).*

This superior "Mouthpiece" who displays God's full glory, who is the exact image of God, rightly upholds the universe by the word of His power. Why shouldn't He? Since He is God, He created all things. Since He is God, He also sustains all things by His own words. Try to imagine what would happen in the universe if God the Son went silent.

That brings us to the apex of the introduction, the reason why it is important to understand the Son's superiority. The Son accomplished salvation. The writer said, *After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (v.3).* How incredible that the exact manifestation of God, yea, God Himself would make purification for sins. But then, who else possibly could? Only God could provide purification from sin. Purification was a big deal to the religious people in Jesus' day. He turned into wine water that was intended for purification rites (John 2:6). Purification for sins through sacrifices was an important duty of the priests. When Jesus healed the leper, He told him to go to the priests at the temple and offer the sacrifice for cleansing.

That this Jesus, God the Son, establishes and grants purification from sin is the argument of this letter. The priests offered endless sacrifices for purification from sin because there was no final, complete sacrifice available. Jesus, the exact expression of God, made the final purification for sin through the sacrifice of Himself. Then He sat down in the position of authority in the throne room of heaven.

Jesus is superior to all the mouthpieces throughout history who declared God's messages. Jesus is superior to the prophets. Jesus is superior to the priests. Because only Jesus offers the one sacrifice that is acceptable for purification for eternity. God has spoken to the creation through Him. We must listen.